

Data, Fashion System and Systemic Design approach: an information flow strategy to enhance sustainability

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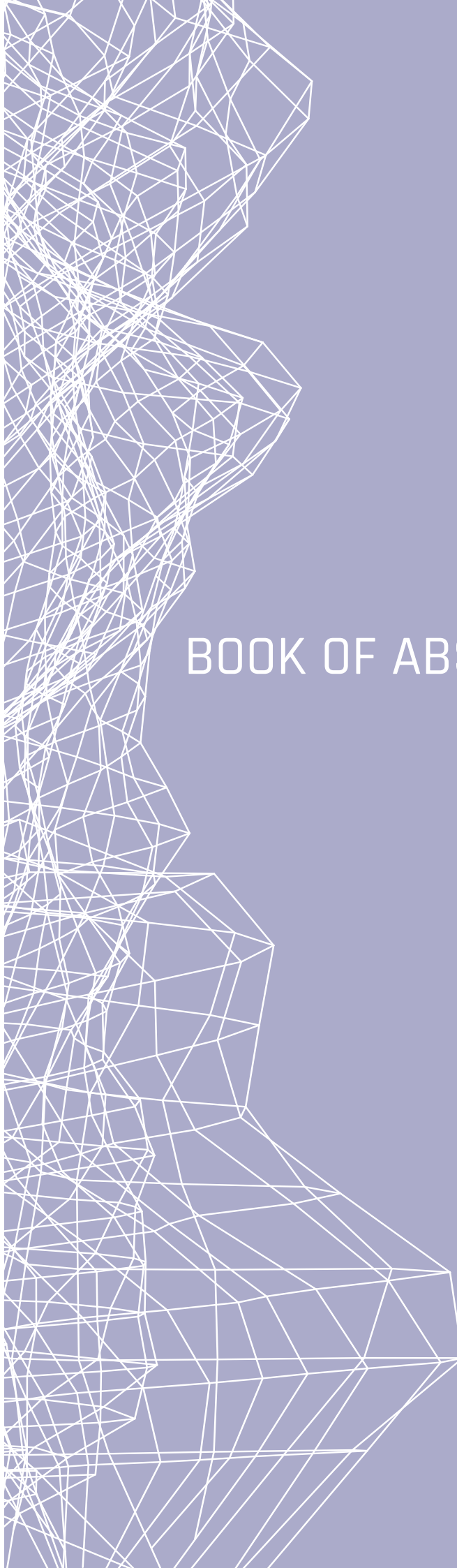
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RELATING
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7th
SYMPOSIUM

CHALLENGING
COMPLEXITY BY
SYSTEMIC DESIGN
TOWARDS
SUSTAINABILITY

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



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CONTENTS

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- 10 | **Bistagnino Luigi** - Systemic Approach generates a new cultural paradigm
- 11 | **Bunnell Pille** - With a Grain of Salt
- 12 | **Govera Chido** - The Future of Hope: Social care for sustainable living
- 13 | **Iñiguez Flores Roberto** - Advanced Design cultures, a learning system perspective
- 14 | **Mauldin Chelsea** - Policy Design & Decision Making
- 15 | **Pauli Gunter** - Re-designing the framework: think natural, think local

PLENARY SPEAKERS

- 17 | **Jones P., Monastiridis S., Ryan A., Tøye V., Van Ael K., Vandenbroeck P.** - State of the Art Practice: Are we Ready for Systemic Design Toolkits?
- 20 | **Sevaldson Birger** - Systemic Design Association
- 22 | **Simon Widmer** - Circular Economy Toolkit

1 | POLICY DESIGN AND DECISION-MAKING

- 24 | **Bellefontaine T., Soliman M.** - Integrating Systems Design and Behavioral Science to Address a Public Sector Challenges from Within
- 27 | **Faiz K., Faiz P., Adha Binti Nordin N., McDonagh D., Woodcock A., Binti Shamsul Harumain Y. A.** - Permeating the barriers between the individual and policy designers in Pakistan: a cross-cultural study of women's mobility
- 32 | **Fassio F., Tecco N.** - Turin Food Atlas. Sharing knowledge towards urban food policies to develop circular cities
- 35 | **Feast L.** - Constitutional Realism and Sustainability: Lessons Learned From a Systemic Design Investigation of New Zealand's Democratic System
- 37 | **Mastroeni M.** - Smart specialization in non-metro canadian regions
- 40 | **Mehta N., Richard C., Raut S., Nahar P.** - A Systems Approach to Sustainability in Space
- 43 | **Metzner-Szigeth A.** - Eco-Social Transformations: Leading Principles and Generative Forces
- 45 | **Muirhead L., Mosse R., Hachey A., Scott N.** - Integration of multiple approaches into the Social Lab practice. A case study from a Social and Public Innovation Lab in New Brunswick, Canada.
- 47 | **Paulsen A., Wildhagen B., Sevaldson B.** - Gearing up the level of systems oriented design in public sector. Case, experiences and learning from Stimulab innovation program
- 50 | **Peter K., Kerr H.** - Alternative Narratives on Economic Growth: Prototyping Change at the System Level
- 53 | **Stamatopoulou A.** - Mapping-and-Designing (in) relationally composed fields

- 62 | **Taverna A., Mortati M.** - A reflection on connecting complexity theory and design for policy
- 66 | **Wildhagen B.** - Understanding variations of entanglement and complexity: A way to influence expectations of Service and Systems Oriented Design in public sector

2 | INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES AND AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS

- 70 | **Dal Palù D., Coraglia V., Lerma B.** - The dark side of high tech precious materials recovery. Overview on the critical issues, opportunities and best practices from a material library point of view
- 73 | **Darzentas J., Darzentas J., de Bruin A., Power M., Prado P., Carmien S., Hobbs E.** - Systemic Design in Food Security and Resilience: Building A Holon
- 77 | **Giordano R., Montacchini E., Tedesco S.** - Building the fashion's future. How to turn textiles' wastes into ecological building products
- 80 | **Konietzko J., Bocken N., Hultink E. J.** - Business Experiments for Circular Urban Food System
- 82 | **Savio L., Thiebat F., Bosia D., Pennacchio R., Manni V.** - Natural fibers insulation panels: an adaptive production
- 85 | **Van der Velden M., Geirbo H. C.** - Repair = Care : Systems stories from Norway and Ghana

3 | SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

- 88 | **Das B., Nahar P.** - Circular Economic Service System Design for Community Based Flood Resilience. Designing a Collaborative Grain Storage and Service System for the Annually Flood Prone Communities of Assam, India
- 92 | **Fiore E.** - New strategies for the refrigerator in the transition towards a circular economy
- 95 | **Germak C., Giuliano L., Abbate L.** - Co-design processes for cleaning and facilities services system
- 98 | **Lomas J., Patel N., Forlizzi J.** - Continuous Improvement: How systems design can benefit the data-driven design community
- 100 | **Tamborrini P., Remondino C., Marino C.** - Data, Fashion System and Systemic Design approach: an information flow strategy to enhance sustainability
- 103 | **Valpreda F., Cataffo M.** - Participatory Design for Service Robotics

4 | TERRITORIAL METABOLISM AND FLOURISHING ECONOMIES

- 107 | **Ambrogio F., Comino E., Dominici L., Rosso M.** - The use of water for technical development or technical development for the use of water?
- 110 | **Battistoni C., Barbero S.** - Systemic design for territorial development: ecosystem to support autopoietic local economies
- 114 | **Bofylatos S., Kampasi I., Spyrou T.** - Designing resilient creative communities through biomimetic service design
- 116 | **Bozzola M., De Giorgi C.** - Packaging reconditioned household appliances
- 119 | **Bucci D., Franconi A., Piovesan F., Tagliazucchi S.** - Analyzing OvestLab's collaborative regene-

ration process through a systemic design lens

- 122 | **Cattozzo L., Marotta L.** - Landscapes and systemic design: Po river Delta (Italy) case
- 125 | **Giraldo Nohra C., Barbero S.** - Post-industrial areas on the lens of systemic design towards flourishing urban resilience
- 129 | **Lambiase N.** - Mapping the Circle. Systemic analysis of the experiences of circular economy in Italy through an app
- 132 | **Lemos Oliveira Mendonca R. M., Ribeiro de Mello E. M., de Oliveira Nery S., Horacio M. P., Ro-meiro Filho E.** - Systemic network around education and community gardens
- 135 | **Schaus M.** - Narrative and Value: Authorship in the Story of Money
- 138 | **Toso D., Luthe T., Kiss T.** - The Systemic Design approach applied to water treatment in the alpine region
- 143 | **Varanasi U.** - Life conservation; A study into systemic design for wildlife

5 | SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SYSTEMS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING

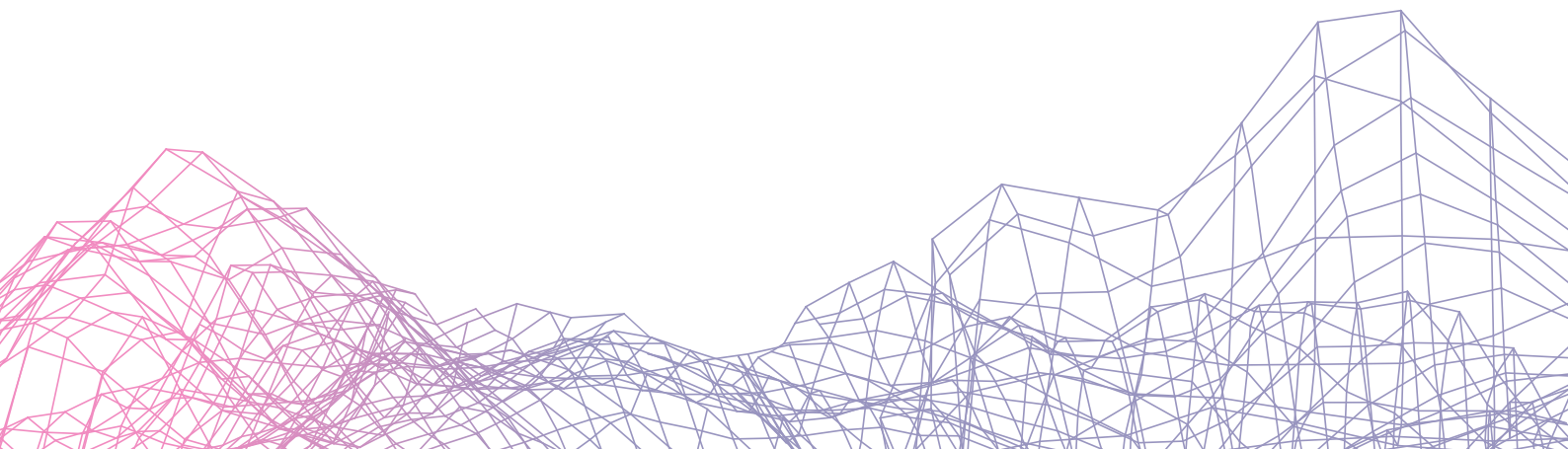
- 145 | **Campagnaro C., Ceraolo S., Di Prima N.** - Systemic and participatory design processes in care systems
- 149 | **Eriksson D., Turnstedt L.** - The Nordics as World Leaders in Sustainable Healthcare and why it Matters to you
- 155 | **Gharavi N., Hozhabri M.** - @Home in Transition. Encouraging asylum seekers towards more self-driven approaches to navigate the unknown they are surrounded with.
- 157 | **Kumar A., Wagle P., Bandarkar V., Nahar P.** - Design for the taste-makers: System oriented social innovation for improving the living condition of salt pan labourers
- 160 | **Kumar G. N., Gupta I., Ruchatz J., Nahar P.** - Ethos Design for a Good Quality Life : Building an innovation framework for individuals and organizations towards resilience and cognitive flexibility
- 163 | **Landa-Avila I. C., Escobar-Tello C., Jun G. T.** - Holistic outcome-based approach towards sustain-able design healthcare: aligning the system purpose through system visualisation
- 165 | **Nie Z., Zurlo F.** - Human-centered Approach for Flourishing: Discovering the Value of Service Ecosystem Design in Psychosocial Career Counselling Service
- 167 | **Rygh K., Støren Berg M., Romm J., Morrison A.** - Pre-fuzzy front end alignment of multiple stakeholders in healthcare service innovation - unpacking complexity through service and systems oriented design in Strategy Sandboxes
- 171 | **Savina A., Vrenna M., Menzardi P., Peruccio P. P.** - The Impact of Food Production on Public Health: Systemic Strategies for a Diffused and Transversal Prevention Plan

6 | MODELS AND PROCESSES OF SYSTEMIC DESIGN

- 176 | **Barba E., Osborn J.R.** - Measuring Sophistication in Systemic Design and Computing
- 179 | **Besplemennova Y., Tassi R.** - Systems Thinking for Service Design
- 182 | **Boehnert J.** - The Visual Representation of Complexity: Sixteen Key Characteristics of Com-plex Systems
- 185 | **Chaplin H., Christopherson K.** - Re-Defining Journalism Education: Using Systems Thinking and Design to Revolutionize the Future of Storytelling

- 187 | **Chung Y., Renaux J., Chikermane V., Rajani J. J.** - Co-Designing a Social Innovation Model for Changemakers
- 190 | **Darzentas J., Darzentas J.** - Perspectives on Systemic Design: examining heterogeneous relevant literature to provide a historical and 'systemically inspired' review
- 194 | **Davidová M.** - Trans-Co-Design in Systemic Approach to Architectural Performance: The Multi-Layered Media and Agency in Creative Design and Its Processes
- 198 | **Jamsin E.** - Computational Models in Systemic Design
- 203 | **Jones P.** - Evolutionary Stakeholder Discovery: Requisite System Sampling for Co-Creation
- 205 | **Lockton D.** - Old Rope: Laing's Knots and Bateson's Double Binds in Systemic Design
- 208 | **Luthe T.** - Systemic Design Labs (SDL): Incubating systemic design skills through experiential didactics and nature-based creativity
- 210 | **Maessen C., van Houten S., van der Lugt R.** - Future Probing for Proadaptive Organizations
- 215 | **Marines Hernández L. E.** - Mapping disciplinary mobility for tackling complex problems
- 217 | **Matic G., Matic A.** - Design for Emergence – Enabling Stakeholder Liminal Transitions and Innovation Value Pivoting through Complex Systemic Transformations
- 220 | **Murphy R.** - Finding the emic in systemic design: Towards systemic ethnography
- 223 | **Murphy R., Jones P.** - Give me the place to stand: Leverage analysis in systemic design
- 226 | **Passia Y., Roupas P.** - The Contingent City: decoding the possibilities of the city's sociospatial metabolism
- 234 | **Perera D.** - Wicked Problems, Wicked Humor: Fun machines as a Method to Frame Wicked Problems in Architecture
- 236 | **Real M., Lizarralde I.** - A constructivist and soft view of systemic design. A tribute to Jean Michel Larrasquet's work
- 239 | **Sevaldson B.** - Beyond User Centric Design
- 242 | **Silverman H., Rome C.** - Distinctions and Analogies: Mapping Social System Identity
- 245 | **Snow T.** - Regenerative Value Systems – Model(s) illustrating flows and transformations of value within production systems
- 252 | **Sweeting B.** - Radically Constructing Place
- 254 | **Tekogul I.** - Design as adaptation
- 257 | **Thompson W. T., Mesquita Da Silva F., Steier F.** - Binocular vision of designing process for whole systems design crossing boundaries
- 260 | **Van Alstyne G., Skelton C., Nan Cheng S.** - Systemic Design and Its Discontents Designing for Emergence and Accountability
- 263 | **Van Gessel C., Van der Lugt R., De Vries R.** - Socionas: Bringing the systemic view into the design for health and sustainability
- 269 | **Vargas Espitia A., Guataquira Sarmiento N. A., Álvarez Quintero C. D., Rugeles Joya W. R.** - Integration of methodologies through an academic toolkit for the design of products services systems for sustainability - SPSS - in Colombian contexts
- 274 | **Vezzoli C., Basbolat C.** - System Design for Sustainability for All. S.PSS Design applied to Distributed Economies
- 278 | **Zivkovic S.** - The Early Stage Analysis of a Systemic Innovation Lab

3 | SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS IN THE DIGITAL AGE



Data, Fashion System and Systemic Design approach: an information flow strategy to enhance sustainability.

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KEYWORDS

Sustainable Fashion;
Big Data;
Systemic Innovation Design;
Information flow.

Nowadays, the role played by the fashion industry in contributing to the degradation of natural systems is increasingly acknowledged.

The impacts on the environment are mainly linked to the use of non-renewable raw materials, water pollution and waste generated. In addition to these socio-cultural implications deriving from the use of cheap labour and undignified working conditions resulted from 'fast' fashion business model, where economies of scale deliver standardized fashion at high volume and low price. Overlaps to all this a significant lack of information and communication between stakeholders make the interpolations of the system difficult to be clear.

In this context therefore characterized by complexity, intricate interdependencies and flux, and a wide span, geographically, epistemologically and in term of disciplines and discourses it draws together since was first introduced to the realm of fashion (Fletcher, 2008) system and design thinking, has provided a helpful viewpoint on the area.

The ambition of this paper is to offer a perspective that faces this complexity and align fashion with sustainability values through insights gained from data.

Specifically using systemic design as a catalyst of change, this research looks through data generated inside fashion system in a holistic way, defining all the process, service and actor as a dynamic whole and not as a fragmented sum of its part.

Contrary to what happens with the sustainability strategies currently in use, which are focused on symptoms, and endorse methods that try to solve single problems not caring about existing relationships, systemic design approach can be an effective tool to restore the lack of information that concern the whole process and all actor.

This approach, which looks at the larger picture, focuses on the transition from a linear vision, where individual environmental issues are addressed, to a systemic approach, where an improvement of the individual components, if put in relation, corresponds to improvements for the whole industry (Bistagnino, 2011, 2016).

To planning the process linked to the paradigm shift, we chose to undertake information flows strategy, allowing the whole system components to be aware of their role and to make the flow of information functional to the objectives of environmental sustainability.

A preliminary literature review reveals in fact that acting in terms of information flow from a systemic perspective does not represent a parametric adjustment, nor a reinforcement or a weakening of an existing cycle.

According to Meadows (2008), the structure of information flows can be an effective leverage point in the fashion system, if the information is delivered where it was not before, causing people to change behaviour. Adding or restoring information, in a fashion system where the information circulating is sometimes not linked to ethical and social value, can therefore, represent a powerful intervention, usually easier and cheaper than reconstructing physical infrastructures.

In the fashion industry, adding to or changing the flows of information between companies in a supply chain or between retailers, designers and consumers can create large changes for little effort (Fletcher, 2008).

However, to trigger action, it is necessary to couple new information with resources and incentives to support the behaviour change.

To fill the information gaps, this research starts from the selection, the organization and matching of a set of data that represent a quantitative input and reveals the importance of a qualitative output graphically and appro-

priately represented.

Data matched with a Systemic Innovation Design Methodology becomes a useful tool to analyze, organize and understand visually all the complexity of process, behaviour and pattern related to fashion system. Mapping the entire lifecycle (fig. 1) highlights that some data are not effectively harvested and appears the need of generating new asset of data collection able to bring the intangibility of shopping and consumption experience to the tangibility of dress and people, spreading the awareness of the entire process inside the system.

Taking advantage of new technologies able to harvest personal data in almost any context we chose to undertake the collection from mapping body shape and consumer habits until the potentialities of open data.

The Body shape set of data assisted with wearable technologies generates information not only useful for companies but able to increase consumer awareness about his purchasing and consuming habits .

In fact, a high empathic value is a key to clothing with a longer life cycle, according to Chapman (2005) work by cultivating an emotional and experiential connection between person and object, we can disrupt our dependency on consumption of new goods to construct meaning and our sense of self.

In this research this operation is supported by the collection of personal data through Near Frequency Communication and IoT devices, concerning wardrobe data, to create personal narratives through customization, personalization, mapping thus the real attachment with specific garments in a particular context and collecting sustainable practices in real time (fig.1).

Figure 1: Example of feasible visual tool starting from the gathering and relation of consumer's data



In conclusion including open data gathering with RFID technology allow to generate a global overview of warehouse movements and production system making the data collection even more transversal and inclusive.

While IOT, RFID, and Near Frequency Communication are powerful tools by themselves regarding data collection, when combined with distributed ledger systems such as blockchain, they enable an authentic traceability, increasing the potential to create a fashion system that is not only sustainable in terms of behavior and resources but also transparent in the processes and transactions.

The focus of the entire research is the use of a systemic design approach to navigating on a complex behavioural system and global supply chain networks. To underline the importance of collecting the interaction and the relationship in a significant dataset, highlighting how it is possible to generate a unitary and coherent understanding of the entire system capable of allowing and supporting sustainable development.

Since fashion is more than the materials that garments are made of, data give us the opportunities to go beyond discrepancies, help businesses make better-informed decisions about the production and distribution of goods

and make the customer aware of socio-environmental problems related with their choices.

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